

Bosque School Student Lobbies Congress for Food Allergy Legislation

Claire Spence, a Bosque School seventh grader, represented New Mexico at the FAAN (Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network) Kids Congress on Capitol Hill in Washington DC last week to lobby New Mexico members of Congress with respect to food allergy legislation, research spend and information provision. Spence met with representatives of Senator Jeff Bingaman, Senator Pete Domenici and Congresswoman Heather Wilson. The bills she was lobbying for were introduced last week and relate to the safe handling of food allergies within schools. The legislation would require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and make available to local educational agencies a voluntary policy to manage the risk of food allergy and anaphylaxis in schools. The legislation would also provide for school based food allergy management incentive grants to local educational agencies to assist such agencies with adoption and implementation of food allergy management guidelines in public K-12 schools. Bosque School was cited as a model for the development of these guidelines.

There are over 2 million school-age children that suffer from life threatening food allergies for which there is no cure. When exposed to the allergen to which a child is sensitive (such as peanuts), he or she may experience an immune system response, which often results in anaphylactic shock. Full blown anaphylactic shock involves the throat swelling until it is completely closed. Lack of administration of an epinephrine injection can result in death or brain damage within as little as four minutes after full anaphylactic shock has occurred. There are over 30,000 hospital admissions in the United States each year as a result of food induced anaphylaxis, and between 150 and 200 deaths annually. Those most at risk of death are teens and those in their early twenties. Recent research (Journal of School Nursing) found that 94% of schools have students with a food allergy. Many allergy sufferers react not only to ingesting the product they are allergic to, but also to touching the product or surfaces the product has made contact with.